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Tabloid Tycoon's Mysterious Death Probed

TENERIFE, Canary Islands (AP) — The death of Robert Maxwell, the tabloid tycoon whose nude body was found floating near his $21 million yacht, is as intriguing as the story of the troubled empire he ran with hands-on tenacity.

The brash, rotund 68-year-old publisher, who died Tuesday, had skipped an appearance a day earlier because he reportedly took ill.

An autopsy was expected today in Tenerife, off the Moroccan coast. Authorities questioned the crew of the yacht and Angel Delgado, the island's civil governor, was personally coordinating the investigation.

Spanish national radio said Maxwell's body was found unclothed and showed no signs of violence. Maxwell was last seen before dawn Tuesday on the yacht, 14 hours before a rescue helicopter pulled his body out of the sea.

Maxwell's Mirror Group Newspapers said the 180-foot vessel was cruising when Maxwell was last seen, walking on its deck.

It said in a statement that he had been the vessel's only passenger, in addition to about a dozen crew members. The publisher was said to be taking a few days off from his hectic work schedule.

The Daily Mirror of London, Maxwell's flagship newspaper, said he had dinner alone in a restaurant on Tenerife, then reboarded the yacht and instructed his crew to cruise all night at sea.

His mysterious death comes as the $2 billion global publishing empire he personally ran, which includes the New York Daily News, is burdened with debt.

Maxwell had been selling assets to raise money to meet a $750 million payment due in October 1992.

In addition, Maxwell had political troubles. He was suing American journalist Seymour Hersh for alleging in a new book that he had ties to Israel's Mossad spy agency.

Two of his sons, both in their 30s, assumed the helm Tuesday and pledged to run the empire with the same zeal as their father.

In London, Charles Wilson, director of the Mirror Group, said there had been no suggestion of foul play in the death: "We can only assume that Mr. Maxwell slipped and fell overboard."

Wilson also ruled out suicide, saying: "He had too much of the arrogance of his own ability to conceive of such a thing."

Maxwell was a big man with a powerful basso voice who browbeat his editors, fought a titanic running battle with rival publisher Rupert Murdoch, and jetted about the world visiting presidents and prime ministers.

"My primary duty is to hire and fire editors," he said recently.

Born Labji Hoch to Jewish peasants in Czechoslovakia, Maxwell lost his parents in the Nazi Holocaust and escaped to Britain in 1940. He was a highly decorated World War II veteran.

Maxwell had in recent years been deepening his business and charity works in Israel, buying its second biggest newspaper and launching a Russian-language weekly for Soviet Jewish immigrants.

Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir mourned the loss of "a passionate friend of Israel."

"He was larger than life," British Conservative Party lawmaker Anthony Beaumont-Dark said of Maxwell. "He was the Citizen Kane of his time. If you wrote a film about his life it would be rejected as unrealistic."

His death raised questions about the future of his holdings. In addition to the New York Daily News, which he rescued from the brink of collapse in March, Maxwell owns several British tabloids and The European, an English-language weekly he founded in May 1990.

The boards of Maxwell's companies named Maxwell's son Kevin, 32, as acting chairman of Maxwell Communications, and son Ian, 35, as acting chairman of the Mirror Group. The sons have long worked in the family business.

This year, Maxwell sold 49 percent of the Mirror Group of newspapers in a public offering and his Pergamon Press publishing house to a Dutch company. He also sold part of his U.S. publishing house, Macmillan, to a British publisher.

Maxwell's oldest son, Phillip, flew to the Canary Islands with Maxwell's widow, Elizabeth, to identify the body.

The yacht's captain, Gus Rankin, said Maxwell wanted "to cruise all night out at sea" so they decided to head in the direction of Grand Canary island.

Maxwell was reported last seen by a member of the crew at 4:25 a.m. Tuesday, walking the deck of the Lady Ghislaine. His last message was a telephone call to the bridge 20 minutes later, asking for the air-conditioning to be turned down.

Weather officials said the skies were clear at the time of Maxwell's disappearance.

The yacht turned back to Terife, anchoring five miles off the southern coast at 9.30 a.m. Ninety minutes later, a phone call to Maxwell's state room was not answered, prompting a search.

Three Spanish helicopters, a plane and three ships searched for six hours and found the body floating in the Atlantic between Grand Canary and Tenerife, said Fernando Cano, spokesman at the Spanish rescue center in Madrid.

Maxwell was to have addressed the Anglo-Israel Association at a London hotel Monday night, but organizers were told about 30 minutes before the event began that he was ill.

AP Laserphoto

The Lady Ghislaine Moored Off Tenerife, Canary Islands, Tuesday

Robert Maxwell

'Doonesbury' Sequence On Quayle Questioned

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — A newspaper editor is refusing to publish a "Doonesbury" cartoon sequence that alleges Vice President Dan Quayle was investigated for cocaine use, and other editors are hesitating.

George B. Waters, publisher of the Daily Sentinel of Rome, N.Y., said "Doonesbury" creator Garry Trudeau sometimes "goes over the edge in taste and possible libel. I don't want to carry out his personal vendettas."

The series is scheduled to run next week in nearly 1,400 publications.

"It contains a sequence that alleges there is a file that exists on Dan Quayle and someone, somewhere, covered up the existence of the file," said Lee Salem, editorial director at Kansas City-based Universal Press Syndicate, which distributes the strip. "We say he was investigated for the purchase of cocaine."

The Drug Enforcement Administration, the agency cited in the strip, refused to comment.

Quayle spokesman David Beckwith said he knows of no file or investigation involving Quayle. The strip will "run exactly where it belongs — on the comics page," he said.

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